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TALK ABOUT “HOOKING UP”: HOW COLLEGE STUDENTS’ ACCOUNTS OF  
“HOOKING UP” IN SOCIAL NETWORKS INFLUENCES ENGAGING IN RISKY SEXUAL  
BEHAVIOR.

By

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B.A., Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, 2005

Thesis

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for the degree of

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Talk About “Hooking up”: How College Students’ Accounts of “Hooking up” in Social Networks Influences Engaging in Risky Sexual Behavior.

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## ABSTRACT

The study focused on how narratives told among social network participants can create a “culture of encouragement” surrounding risky sexual short-term relationships. The study adopted a social network approach to examine the “hookup” culture and risky sexual behavior. Specifically, this study examines who students are talking to, how frequently they discuss sexual experiences, and the specific accounts they discuss in connection with the hookup culture. Two research questions were asked to understand participants’ personal definitions of hooking up and what factors lead to engaging in a hookup. The researcher also hypothesized that network closeness, frequency, and range would influence an individual’s attitude and behavior about non-relationship sex.

The study found that the more individuals discuss hooking up with their social network, the more they report approving of and participating in non-relationship sex. Also, the most common hookup scripts described in this study were those that are social (network present). The results of this study revealed that hooking up does occur on college campuses and individuals’ networks do influence their self-approval and participation in non-relationship sex.

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## CHAPTER 1: RATIONALE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### Rationale

Talking about short term intimate relationships is far from a novel concept in modern culture. Since the sexual revolution in the mid-1960s, the way in which young individuals behave, interact, and communicate in intimate interactions has been forever changed (Bailey, 1988; Whyte 1990). As dating culture evolves, so does the way scholars study intimate interaction. In more recent years, the phenomenon of “hooking up” on college campuses has become a focus to study among social scientists (Bogle, 2008; Bogle, 2007; Glenn & Marquardt 2001; Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003; Paul & Hayes 2000; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2002).

“Hookup” is a term used to describe a broad variety of intimate interactions that take place outside dating or exclusive relationships (Bogle, 2008; Bogle, 2007; Glenn & Marquardt 2001; Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003; Manning, Longmore & Giordano, 2006; Paul & Hayes 2002; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2002). Scholars have studied “one-night stands,” casual sex, and “non-relationship” sex (Bogle, 2008; Manning, Longmore & Giordano, 2006; Paul & Hayes, 2002), the shift from dating to hooking up (Bogle, 2008 Glenn & Marquardt 2001), the definitions of hooking up (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; Lambert et al., 2003; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000), and the characteristics of hooking up culture (Paul, et al., 2000). However, even though recent research suggests that non-relationship sex is a common form of intimate interaction among young individuals; the hookup phenomenon is still understudied from a communication perspective. Since communication frequently functions to help individuals attain relational, personal, and social goals (Berg, 1997; Dillard, 1990), understanding how the hookup culture is communicated can give scholars, parents, and universities better insight into college



students' lives. A communication perspective can help individuals understand how talking about hooking up could affect an individual's choice of engaging in risky sexual behavior.

Bogle (2007) notes that scholars are just starting to understand what hooking up is, how it functions, and some of the outcomes of such relationships. There is still a need to understand how the hooking up phenomenon is communicated in everyday talk and its effects on the college culture. Even more important are the choices students make about hooking up. Although college can be an exciting time for intimate interactions, it can also carry dangerous risks in how college students communicate, interact, and create relationships. Discussing hooking up in daily interactions within social networks may normalize or influence unsafe behavior in such a way that may result in unwanted sexual behavior and consequences, such as unwanted pregnancies, sexual assault, AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Despite recent research on the connection between the hooking up culture and unwanted sexual behaviors and consequences (Bogle, 2008; Flack, Daubman, and Caron, 2007; Paul & Hayes, 2002), there is still uncertainty as to why students engage in this potentially risky behavior. This current study adopts a social network approach to examine the "hookup" culture and potentially risky sexual behavior. Specifically, this study examines who students are talking to, how frequently they discuss sexual experiences, and the specific accounts they discuss in connection with the hookup culture. The goal of this study is to examine whether narratives told among social network participants can create a "culture of encouragement" surrounding risky sexual short-term relationships.

## Review of Literature

### *Conceptual Definitions of Hooking Up*

The phrase “hooking up” is extremely ambiguous. This leads to the focus on the meanings of hooking up. “To say ‘we hooked up’ could mean a couple kissed, or had sex, or had oral sex, but no one will know for sure” (Glenn and Marquardt, 2001, p.5). Since hooking up can mean anything from kissing to sexual intercourse, it is an extremely ambiguous phrase and therefore calls for more research in how individuals communicate it. In fact, Glenn and Marquardt (2001) also note that the ambiguity of the phrase may play a role in its popularity.

Paul et al. (2000) define a hookup as “a sexual encounter, usually only lasting one night, between two people who are strangers or brief acquaintances” (p.76). Glenn and Marquardt (2001) state that a “hookup” is “when a girl and a guy get together for a physical encounter and don’t necessarily expect anything further” (p. 4). Glenn and Marquardt also describe a hookup as “distinctive sex-without-commitment interaction between college men and women” (p.4). However, Bogle (2008), who has done in-depth qualitative studies about hooking up, suggests that even these definitions may be misleading. Bogle found through her qualitative study that a hookup can be more than a “one night stand.” Many of her interviewees mentioned hooking up multiple times with the same person. Also, in a hookup the two people are not always strangers. Many interviewees in Bogle’s study stated that they usually knew the person they hooked up with from class, activities, or parties. It was also not uncommon for a participant in the hookup to want something further, those participants usually being females. Even though there is no single definition, and at times the current definitions can be misleading, the word *hookup* has made an impact on campus culture and the way students talk about intimate

interactions. Hence, to better understand the definition of hooking up I propose the first research question:

RQ 1: How do college students in this study define a hookup?

### *The Historical Significance of Hookup Relationships*

Bogle (2007) states that “in recent years, research has been building that suggests dating has been replaced by ‘hooking up’ as the dominant way for heterosexual students to get together on college campuses” (p.775). The route to marriage for today’s young men and women has changed so much that even their own generation does not have a concrete definition of the path (Bogle, 2007, 2008; Glenn and Marquardt, 2001). All that is known is that the way young people intimately interact has changed over the past century. Bogle (2008) states that over the past 100 years there have been three main shifts in how young individuals created relationships, the “calling era,” “dating era,” “and “hookup era.” By examining these three main shifts, individuals can better understand how the hooking up culture emerged into today’s society.

The “calling era” was the time where a young man would call a woman to spend time with her in the presence of her family (Bailey, 1988). Bailey also mentions, during this visit the young man and woman would rarely get alone time and the woman usually had the say if she would like to pursue the relationship farther. Since the “calling era” was mostly used by middle and upper class citizens, the lower class men and women created their own way to spend time with someone they were interested in by going to a location outside their parents’ houses. As a result, the slang word “dating” emerged (Bailey, 1988). By the 1920s dating became a “universal custom in America,” and it consisted of a young man and woman going somewhere (e.g. movie theater or restaurant) together (Bailey, 1988, p. 19). After World War II, the tone and definition of dating shifted to mean a couple was exclusive (“going steady”), since men were

scarce on college campuses due to the war (Bailey, 1988). Research shows that during this era, it was common for young men and women to engage in sexual intimacy, such as, petting and necking (Whyte, 1990). Even though some premarital sex occurred, it was not the norm among youth until the mid-1960s.

During the mid-1960s, the way young people interacted changed dramatically (Bailey, 1988; Horowitz, 1987; Murstien, 1980), and was most evident on college campuses (Horowitz, 1987; Strouse, 1987). Students hung out in groups rather than pairs, meeting at parties and bars became a norm, and attitudes towards sexual interaction shifted. These trends along with the rise of the feminist movement were all key influences on how young people interacted on campus (Bailey, 1988; Horowitz, 1987; Murstien, 1980; Rubin, 1990). The mid-1960s were just the beginning of a new way of thinking about intimate interaction. College campuses became more relaxed on policies about opposite sex restrictions in dorms (Bogle, 2008; Lance, 1976), and young individuals began to wait to get married until late into their 20s (Surra, 1990; Bianchi & Casper, 2000). However, with young adults still wanting to experience sexual activity (Cate & Lloyd, 1992), on college campuses the hookup culture has become more common.

The change in intimate interaction among young individuals in the twentieth century was just the beginning to a new wave of change. The way college institutions set up student conduct policies on campus began to shift as more single-sex institutions became coed (Bailey, 1988; Poulson & Higgins, 2003). With the changing attitudes in the mid-twentieth century, universities and colleges across America also had to shift from the once strict regulation of students' sexual behavior, with curfews, no coed dorms, and no overnight guest of the opposite sex, to today's virtually limitless access to students of the opposite sex (Bailey, 1988). Universities and colleges changed the approach of being responsible for their students' interactions with the

opposite sex (Poulson & Higgins, 2003) to promoting safe sexual practices and “warning students about sexual assault and sexually transmitted diseases” (Bogle, 2008, p. 22). Bogle (2008) also states that, with young men and women attending classes together, living in coed dormitories/houses, and practically having unrestricted access to the opposite sex, campus trends made it easier for students to “hookup” without worries of being penalized.

Not only did the college scene change in the twentieth century, so did the college students’ attitudes. Bianchi and Casper (2000) found that young individuals were waiting longer to get married. In the 1960’s the average for women was 20 years of age and men 23 years of age, whereas now the average age for women is 25 and men 27 (Bianchi and Casper, 2000). The current average for marriage for both sexes is past the time that most people attend college. Therefore college is no longer a point to potentially meet a future partner, but is rather a time to have fun in non-committed relationships. In Bogle’s (2008) study she found “many college students referred to college as a time to ‘party’ or a time to ‘let loose’” (p. 51). Even though some individuals have exclusively committed relationships throughout college, more seem to shy away from this because it may interfere with the “having fun” mentality (Bogle, 2008). With more college students engaging in the hookup culture, it has also become a common topic to talk about with one another.

Engaging in conversation about hooking up with an individuals’ social network has become as common as talking about what classes they are taking or how their college football team did last weekend. A study done by Paul and colleagues (2000) found that 78 percent of undergraduate students attending a large university had engaged in at least one hookup. Glenn and Marquardt (2001) also found that 91 percent of college women reported that hookups occur “very often” to “fairly often” on their college campuses. Since coming to college 40 percent

reported that they had personally engaged in a hookup. This trend of hooking up has become a common choice for intimate interaction on universities across the country and may influence a student's likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behavior.

### *Hooking Up as a Risky Behavior*

Understanding risky behavior is important, as many behaviors have a direct effect on the health of both the college student and the people in his/her life (Schneider & Morris, 1991).

The college years are a time students experiment with and engage in a variety of risky behaviors (Dorsey, Scherer, & Real, 2007; Gruber, J. 2001; Schneider & Morris, 1991; Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Castillo, 1995). Risky behaviors are seen as actions people engage in that may have a negative impact on their well-being and future (Adams, 1995; Gruber, 2001), and that have one or more uncertain outcomes (Gruber, 2001).

For many students, college is the first time they have complete freedom to make their own decisions. Research has shown that college is a time students engage in many types of potentially risky behavior, particularly including drinking alcohol (Dorsey, Scherer, & Real, 2007; Schneider & Morris, 1991) and unsafe or unplanned sexual activity (Bogle, 2008; Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Castillo, 1995). However, they may not see these activities as risky due to what is normal in the college culture. An abundant amount of research also shows the relationship between alcohol consumption and risky sexual behaviors (Abbey et al, 2003; Bensen, Gohm, & Gross, 2007; Carroll & Carroll, 1995; Dermen, Cooper, & Agocha, 1998).

Studies by Cooper (2002) and Leigh & Stall (1993) found that drinking alcohol and sexual risk taking often co-occur and thus, it is hard to separate alcohol and drug use from risky sexual behaviors. College students may consider it acceptable to hookup or engage in non-relationship sex with another person after they have been drinking with the rationale that they

were intoxicated and not thinking clearly. Students have different beliefs about how people act when they drink. If an individual believes that alcohol promotes risky sexual behavior, he/she may be more likely to engage in non-relationship sex when consuming alcohol than an individual who does not hold this belief (Derman & Cooper, 1994). Although the current study does not focus on alcohol use in college, it is important to note that alcohol is a part of the hooking up culture, and may have an influence on risky sexual behavior.

With hooking up viewed as normative on college campuses (Bogle, 2007), students may not see the risks and dangers in engaging in casual sex or sexual activity. However, with the continued threat of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), unwanted pregnancies, HIV/AIDS (Catania, Coates, Stall, Turner, Peterson, Hearst, Dolcini, Hudes, Gagnon, Wiley, & Gloves, 1992; Daily, 1997), and cases of sexual assault (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Sampson, 2002), engaging in hooking up that is non-relationship sex can be a risky behavior with some very serious consequences. Catania and colleagues (1992) stated that engaging in sexual intercourse is the most risky in terms of transmission of STDs and unwanted pregnancies in a “casual” context because the individuals are less likely to know each others’ sexual and personal history.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2007 study, found that about 19 million new STD infections cases arise each year in the United States and almost half of those cases are among young people between the ages of 15 – 24. The two most commonly reported STDs in the United States are chlamydia and gonorrhea. Chlamydia and gonorrhea are transmitted through oral, anal, or vaginal sex and if left untreated could result in infertility. Studies have found young and minority women are most severely impacted by long-term consequences (infertility and health) when untreated (CDC, 2007). The CDC annual report

(2007) states that, the best way to avoid infection is to abstain from sex or to be in a monogamous relationship, in which a person is more likely to know partners sexual history. The CDC (2007) report states a decline in HIV/AIDS infections and increase condom use during sexual intercourse. However, the National Center of HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention (NCHHSTP) annual report in 2008, found a high occurrence of anal sex (more than 30% of sample) and oral sex (more than 60% of sample) with relatively low levels of condom use. This suggests concern with college students engaging in anal and oral sex without protection. The hookup culture promotes “casual” intimate interactions, which could lead college students to engage in sexual activities with people they hardly know. A “casual” hookup has great risks that may affect a college student’s future (i.e., cause infertility, affecting a women’s chance to bear children later in life). While the college years are a time to experiment and take risks, it is uncertain if talking about hooking up and its consequences (i.e., STDs; condom use) influences student’s sexual behaviors and attitudes.

Bogle’s (2008) research also found that “at bars and parties, college students may be in an environment where they can meet potential hookup partners, but the alcohol helps facilitate the interaction between potentially interested parties” (Bogle, 2008, p. 63). Not only does alcohol help facilitate a potential hookup; it may lead to unwanted sexual behavior. Many studies have found a strong connection between alcohol consumption and sexual assault (Abbey, Ross, McDuffie, and McAuslan, 1996; Copenhaver & Grauerholze, 1991; Fisher, Sloan, Cullen, & Chummeng 1998; Humphrey & White, 2000). The mixture of heavy alcohol consumption and non-relationship sex could be dangerous. As a result, when students engage in risky behavior, such as drinking and unplanned sexual activity, the chance of unwanted non-relationship sex may increase.



Research shows that college women are at greater risk of sexual assault and rape than women outside the college population (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Sampson, 2002). The US Department of Justice (2000) mentions that unwanted sexual behavior; which includes sexual assault, unwanted fondling, and rape; remain an all too frequent experience in college. One in four women reported having experienced sexual assault during their time attending college (US Department of Justice, 2000). Flack, Daubman, and Caron (2007) did one of the first studies relating unwanted sexual behavior (anal, oral, and vaginal sex) and hooking up. These authors found 78 percent of females reported that all unwanted sexual behaviors occurred during a hookup because individuals felt pressured into unwanted risky sexual activities. Many women frequently report that their worst hookup experience was when they were pressured to engage in unwanted sexual activities and felt shame afterwards (Bogle, 2008; Paul & Hayes, 2002).

#### *Communication and Risky Behavior*

Real and Rimal (2007) studied perceptions of alcohol consumption among college students, and found a relationship between the frequency of communication about alcohol and alcohol related risky behavior. A separate study discovered a significant relationship between the topics of students' conversations and their use of alcohol (Lo & Globetti, 1993). Thus, it seems that topics and frequency of conversation in a person's social network may be important when examining risky sexual hookups.

#### *The Role of Social Networks Interaction in Promoting Hookup Relationships*

Social Network Theory (SNT) focuses on the nature of the relationships that surround individuals and how those relationships influence attitudes and behaviors (Heaney & Israel, 1995). Laumann, Marsden, and Prensky (1983) wrote that, "From a network perspective, individual behavior is viewed as at least partially contingent on the nature of an actor's social

relationships” (p. 18). Thus, it is important to not only pay attention to the actors in the network, but what types of social relationships exist (Laumann, Marsden, & Prensky, 1983). Social networks are also important in the development of young individuals’ thoughts and behaviors. Through interactions in a group context, young people are able to discover more about themselves as well as their relationships with others (Cotterell, 2007). This is relevant to the current study since college is a time students grow personally, academically, and socially.

Research has shown that social networks can play a positive or negative role in an individual’s relationships and health. For example, social networks in relationships have been found to play a role in success and satisfaction in times of relational distress and conflict (Julien & Markman, 1991). Networks are also positively linked with physical health (Heaney & Israel, 1995; Seeman, Seeman, & Sayles, 1985), increased resistance to illness (Adler & Matthews, 1994; Ell, 1984), modeling healthy behaviors (Albracht & Adelman, 1987; Brownell & Schumaker, 1985), buffering of stress (Hibbard, 1985), decreased smoking and substance abuse (Heaney & Israel, 1995), and increased frequency of cancer screenings (Heaney & Israel, 1995). Even though research has highlighted the benefits of social networks related to health, studies have also found that social networks can play a negative role in risky behavior. For example, studies have associated social networks with adolescent drug use (Cotterell, 2007; Kandel, 1973), and alcohol abuse on college campus (Abbey, Ross, McDuffie, and McAuslan, 1996; Baer, Stacy, & Larimer, 1991; Dorsey, Scherer, & Real, 1999; Real & Rimal, 2007).

This current study will focus on how social networks can encourage or discourage risky behavior, such as non-relationship sex. For this study, a network approach provides an appropriate framework for examining the potential influence that social networks play in college students’ risky sexual behaviors or non-relationship sex. Specifically, this study examines how

discussing non-relationship sex within a person's social networks might influence a person's attitude or behavior toward risky sexual behavior.

Research shows that individuals are more willing to take risks among their social network because they feel safe (Cotterell, 2007). For example, a study done by Manning, Giordano, and Longmore (2006) on "nonrelationship" sex found that most adolescents choose to have sex with others within their social networks. Those considered friends (48%) and ex-girlfriends or boyfriends (14%) were the most common. Also, talking about certain issues in a social network could influence the perception of whether an action is risky. Dorsey, Scherer, and Real (1999) found a positive relationship between the frequency of talking about drinking alcohol and drinking alcohol in excess. Dorsey, et al. (1999) also investigated the connection between discussion about alcohol and excessive drinking by examining who students talk to, with whom students associate with, and how frequently they talk about alcohol. This current study will build upon these studies by looking at the specific details of the accounts shared in conversation and the influence of social network's attitudes and behavior on non-relationship sex.

This current study will approach social networks from a relational view by focusing on relationships in a person's individual or ego-centered social network and the influence of these relationships on a person's attitudes and behaviors (Burt, 1983a; Monge & Eisenberg, 1987; Stohl, 1995, Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In an ego-centered social network, all actors (alters) directly connect with a particular actor (ego).

An ego-centered network, also called a personal network, "consists of a focal actor, termed ego, a set of alters who have ties to ego, and measurements on the ties among these alters" (Wasserman & Faust, 1994, p. 42). In an ego-network all actors (alters) directly connect with a particular actor (ego) (Burt, 1983a). Stohl (1995) also stated that ego-centered networks

encompass “all the linkages an individual has across a social sphere. The nature, intimacy, and impact of these relationships change over time” (p. 27-28). Therefore, who an individual associates and the closeness of the individual’s associations, will influence the behavior of that individual.

The most important elements in a relational approach to social networks include: range, closeness, and frequency (Burt, 1983b; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). *Range* refers to the different actors in a person’s network. This current study will adapt the Dorsey et al., (1999) approach that “range refers to the number of different types of network links students, specifically whether or not they talked to friends, family, professors, RAs or peer counselors, or a combination,” about hooking up (1999, p. 321). Different actors in a network represent different social and status groups (Burt, 1983a). For example, the range of a college student’s social network may encompass, but is not limited to, friends, family, classmates, and professors. Burt (1983a) states that a person’s network can have extensive range and the greater the range, the more diversity of knowledge and social support are available to that person. Range in a college student’s network could provide more diversity of knowledge about the college culture, more specifically hooking up. For example, a student with a narrow range and who only talks to college friends about engaging in hooking up might think hooking up is not a risky behavior; whereas, a student with a wider range who talks to his/her family, counselor, non-collegiate friends, or religious leaders, may see hooking up as a more risky behavior. It would seem that the range of an individuals’ network could affect behavior and attitude toward hooking up. As such, this current study hypothesizes:

H1: Network range will be negatively related to network approval of non-relationship sex attitude and behavior.

Along with range, closeness is part of relational networks and is another area that may influence an individual's attitudes and behavior when it comes to hooking up. For this study closeness will refer to how connected an individual is to another individual in his/her personal network. Understanding closeness in relationships within a social network can help discover if the closeness between the dyad influences a person's attitudes and behaviors towards the hookup culture.

Stohl (1995) stated that close networks “tend to have several things in common: (a) norms and expectations are agreed upon and made apparent; (b) there are multiple and consistent models of ‘appropriate behavior’ and interpretation; (c) people are rewarded for normative actions” (p. 41). Networks can explain why there is consensus among members of a group on a certain issue (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The more face-to-face interaction that occurs, the greater the homogeneity and the less face-to-face interaction that occurs, the less the homogeneity (Freidkin, 1984). Collins (1988) also mentions that, “the more tightly that individuals are tied into a network, the more they are affected by group standards” (p.416).

In college, students experience a strong amount of pressure to conform to college culture and norms (Bolge, 2008). Since hooking up has become a common intimate interaction among college students (Bogle, 2008), the cohesiveness of an individual's college social network could play a role in engaging in risky non-relationship sex. In addition, the amount of involvement in college life a student engages in could also play a role. For example, a student who lives on campus and rarely goes to their parent's house or visits high school friends may be influenced differently than a student who goes home to their family and high school friends every weekend. The study proposes two hypotheses:

H2: Network approval will be positively related to non-relationship sex attitude and behavior.

H3: Network closeness will moderate the relationship between network approval and non-relationship sex attitude and behavior.

Along with looking at an individual's closeness and range in his/her social network, *frequency* of conversation about certain issues is important. When studying frequency in social networks, most research on health behaviors has focused on the frequency of contact within a certain social relationship (Hibbard, 1985; Seeman, et al., 1985). Dorsey et al. (1999) went beyond looking at contact in social networks and focused on frequency of talk about alcohol related issues and behaviors within a social network and the connection with engaging in excessive drinking. However, few have examined the frequency of conversation about certain issues with hooking up in personal networks and the link to risky sexual behavior. Examining the frequency of talking about hooking up can help us better understand the link between what is being talked about in social networks and students' behaviors. Dorsey, Scherer, and Real (1999) found a positive relation between frequency of conversation about drinking and whether or not a student drinks in excess. In dealing with the hookup culture it seems relevant to look at the frequency of talking to others about hooking up and engaging in risky sexual behavior. As such, this study will hypothesize:

H4: College network frequency of discussion of non-relationship sex will be positively related to non-relationship sex attitude and behavior.

Parks (1997) stated, "The information or content that flows through the network structure is, of course, at least as important as the structure itself" (p. 364). Thus in addition to studying the social network structure of range, closeness, and frequency, the current study will examine

the types of *accounts* in conversation scripts that influence hooking up attitudes. A student's choice to engage in risky sexual behavior may depend on how certain accounts of hooking up are discussed within their network. If a student is engaging in mostly negative discussion about hooking up, such as the consequences or dangers, one would expect a negative view of engaging in hooking up. However, if conversation with friends reinforces the idea that hooking up is a normal college experience, the student may be more likely to engage in hooking up and to view it as less risky. Studying accounts in actual conversations will aid the investigation by going beyond just the frequency of talking about hooking up to expose what students actually talk about that may influence behavior. With college students engaging in conversation about relationships it seems a conversation of a student's hookup experience or encounter may be commonly talked about. Knowing more about what is said in these accounts and what patterns of behavior (hookup scripts) progress to a hookup will aid in better understanding how young people view hooking up. In addition, understanding the patterns or common script that leads to hookups can give insight into what patterns or script types are risky. As such, this study offers the following research question and hypothesis:

RQ 2: What are the types of accounts described about hookups?

As previously mentioned, social networks have the power to be either a positive or a negative influence on a person's behaviors. However, there is still much to learn about the link between discussing hooking up in college student's social networks and engaging in possible unsafe non-relationship sex.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODS

### *Participants*

A total of 274 participants were recruited from undergraduate communication courses at a medium-sized university in the northwestern United States. Participants were offered a small amount of extra credit for their participation. The participants were, on average, 20.39 years old ( $SD = 2.88$ ). One hundred and thirty-six (49.6%) were male, and 138 (50.4%) were female. Of the participants, 141 (51.5%) were first year college students, 70 (25.5%) were sophomores, 40 (14.6%) were juniors, 16 (5.8%) were seniors, and seven (2.6%) reported other. The sample was predominantly Caucasian (89%), followed by Asian (5.5%), Native American (1.5%) and individuals from other ethnic origins (4%). In addition, 97.1% reported a heterosexual orientation. Of the 274 participants, 157 (57.3%) indicated being single, 109 (39.8%) were seriously dating, and eight (2.9%) were married.

### *Procedure*

The researcher recruited participants by visiting 18 sections of an introductory communication course and asked volunteers to complete a 20-minute online-survey about short-term relationships. Since participants came from an introductory course, which is required by the majority of majors at the university, the assumption can be made that the data is more generalizable than a sample from another course. To protect the students' anonymity, the researcher gave every student a handout that included a short description of the study's purpose and the URL address to access the *Short-term Relationship* survey online. The students were instructed on how to access the questionnaire and informed that accessing and completing the online survey was considered consent to participate. The research reminded the participants that



their participation was completely voluntary, that they could withdraw from participation at any time with no penalties, and that all responses were anonymous.

To receive extra credit, participants were asked to give their name and class section number at the end of the online questionnaire. The participants were only asked for their name and section number to receive extra credit, and that information was not connected to the online questionnaire they completed. The questionnaire and extra credit information (name and course number) were automatically separated by the online survey software program to protect the student's anonymity. Participants were instructed not to put their name anywhere else on the online questionnaire to keep them anonymous. Upon completion of the online questionnaire, the last page of the survey had a short debriefing of the study and provided information for counseling and mental health services in case any felt discomfort.

### *Measures*

The questionnaire included both Likert-type scales and open-ended questions eliciting narratives. Demographic variables, including age, gender, year in school, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and relationship status were assessed prior to further measurement. In order to test the research questions, the researcher asked participants to answer open-ended questions about their personal definition of "hooking up" and to describe one particular "hookup" experience that they knew about or had participated in. After completing these items, students were given the following definition of hooking up for the purpose of this study: "hooking up is used to describe a sexual encounter (vaginal, anal, or oral sex) between two people who are not in a dating or serious relationship and do not expect anything further." Respondents were asked to keep the definition in mind when completing the rest of the survey. In order to test the hypotheses, the researcher adapted three instruments, including measurements of attitudes towards college social

life and casual hookups/ non-relationship sex (Herold, Maticka-Tyndale, and Mewhinney, 1998), social network frequency and range (Dorsey, et al., 1999), and perceived network involvement and closeness (Knobloch & Donovan, 2006).

A Measure of Normative Beliefs by Herold, et al. (1998) was adapted to assess views towards engaging in hookup relationships. The instrument was originally used to test people's attitudes towards engaging in casual sex. For the purpose of the current study, the phrase casual sex was changed to "hooking up." One example being, "I would feel comfortable engaging in a hookup if I just met someone appealing, and he/she wanted to hookup." Three questions were asked and measured on 5-point Likert-type scales where 1 equals "strongly disagree" and 5 equals "strongly agree". Chronbach's alpha was .871.

The questionnaire also included questions that focused on college students' behaviors and attitudes within the hooking up culture. Participants were presented with questions such as, "Since you have come to college, have you experienced a hookup?" and "Please think of other students at your school. How often do you think a typical student has hooked up in the current school year?"

Network frequency and range was measured by adapting Dorsey et al. (1999) four-point scale to measure the range and frequency of each person's ego network. The original instrument was used to study the role of who students are talking to, who students are affiliated with, and how frequently they talking about potential effects of risky behaviors when using alcohol. The current study adapted Dorsey et al. (1999) measure to reflect how often respondents talked to others about the hooking up phenomenon. Students were asked how many times over the past four months they had talked with various types of people (i.e., friends from the University, friends outside the University, and family members) about five topics related to engaging in

hooking up or consequences of hooking up. Topics included people engaging in casual sex or hookups, unwanted sexual advances, safe sex practices, the connection of alcohol and casual sex or hookups, and potential consequences of casual sex or hookups. Responses were measured on a four-point ordinal scale (0 = Never, 1 = 1-2 times, 2 = 3-6 times, 3 = more than 6 times). The three types of networks previous mentioned were combined to create indexes to assess frequency and range. The Chronbach's alpha on the three network types were above .70 reliability. Friends from the university was .79, non-university friends was .73, and family indicated .78.

*Frequency* refers to how often a student reported talking about a topic relating to hooking up or consequences of hooking up with university friends, non-university friends, and family members, or a mixture in the last four month. *Range* refers to the number of different types of networks links students have (Dorsey, et al., 1999), specifically, whether the participant talked to university friends, non-university friends, and family members, or a combination of all these during the past four months. A link existed if the participant indicated speaking about any of the topics listed in the last four month (i.e., if students indicated 1 or greater on four-point scale) with each of the three types of network members. Range was the sum of these links, each averaged across the five topics. Thus, range could vary from 0-3 with a three indicating that a person talked to people in all the three networks categories about all five topics.

The measure of perceived network involvement used by Knobloch and Donovan-Kicken (2006) was adapted to assess perceived approval or disapproval of the hooking up phenomenon. Knobloch and Donovan-Kicken (2006) originally used this instrument to test how members of a person's network help or hinder his/her romantic relationship. In the current study, participants were first asked to list up to three people in their college group who (a) "you talk with most" and (b) "spend the most time with." Next, participants were asked to indicate if they have talked to

the three people listed about a hookup experience. Lastly, participants were asked to complete a five-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree) for each person listed. Five items measured closeness with the network member: (a) This person is influential in my life. (b) My relationship with this person is very close. (c) I communicate with this person often. (d) I care about what this person thinks. (e) This person's opinion matters to me. The fifteen items (5 closeness items for each person) were combined into one index referred to as network closeness. The measure of network closeness had Chronbach's alpha of .900.

An additional six items measured the network member's approval towards the hookup phenomenon: (a) This person thinks engaging in a hookup is wrong (b) This person thinks engaging in a hookup is risky (c) This person believes hooking up is a normal part of college social life. (d) This person discourages me from getting involved in a hookup. (e) This person chooses not to engage in hookups. (f) This person believes hooking up is safe. The eighteen ratings (6 ratings for each person) were combined to create network approval. The measure of network approval had a Chronbach's alpha of .890.

## CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Ninety-four percent of college students in this study had heard of the phrase “hooking up” in reference to sexual activities. Of the 274 participants, 146 (54.3%) reported having participated in a hookup (defined as anal, oral, or vaginal sex) during the current school year. Participants who engaged in a hookup in the current school year included 86 males and 60 females. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between the sexes in having experienced a hookup in the current school year  $\chi^2 [1, n= 146] = 8.90, p < .01$ . An examination of the cell percentages indicated that 63.2% of males reported engaging in a hookup versus 45.1% of females. Of the 146 participants who did engage in a hookup, 16.7% reported doing so one time, 13.5% two times, 12.8% five or more times, 7.3% three times, and 3.3% four times. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between males and females in how often they reported having hookups  $\chi^2 [4, N= 146] = 10.37, p < .05$ . Males reported engaging in a hookup 5 or more times, 18.4% (N = 25), whereas female reported engaging in a hookup 5 or more times 7.5% (N = 10). When asked how often a typical student at their school was hooking up, 10% of participants reported one time, 26.1 percent reported two times, 31.3 percent reported three times, 11.6 percent reported four times, and 20.9 percent reported five or more times.

### *Hooking up Narratives*

#### *Definitions of hooking up.*

The first research question asked how college students in this current study define a hookup. The personal hookup definitions were examined and organized through inductive content analysis. After transcribing and sorting the definitions into similar examples, the researcher derived a set of seven definition categories. Next, the researcher and one research assistant, who was blind to the study’s research questions and hypotheses, independently coded

the entire set of personal definitions. The unit of analysis was a single definition of a hookup behavior. To ensure independence of the reports, only the participant/s personal definition was coded in any instance in which more than one unique hookup definition was reported (i.e., “I believe hooking up is sex, however, my friends sometimes refer to it as kissing.”) Cohen’s Kappa indicated excellent reliability between the two coders ( $k = .94$ ) and percent of agreement was 96%. All but ten of the 259 narratives fit into one of the six types of hookup definitions. Seven types of hookup definitions were included in the analysis: (a) sexual encounter, (b) all encompassing, (c) one-night stand, (d) fooling around, (e) kissing, (f) dating and (g) other. The results indicated that most participants reported a hookup as being sex (sexual encounter and one-night stand), some reported a hookup as not sex (fooling around and kissing), and many indicated that the term hooking up was ambiguous with regards to sex activities (all encompassing). Table 1 displays definitions, frequencies, and examples of each category.

#### *Accounts of hookup experiences*

The second research question focused on what types of accounts and/or factors are involved in a “hookup” experience. Participants provided detailed information about a specific hookup they knew about. Participants reported, (a) how they knew about hookup; (b) who was involved in the hookup; (c) where hookup took place; and (d) what factors lead to the hookup (see Table 2 for three prototypical participant’s description of factors in a hookup). The researcher examined and organized the first three topics through inductive content analysis and then the researcher and one research assistant independently coded each topic area. Five categories were used to describe “how participants knew about the hookup”: (a) first person experiences; (b) word of mouth, (c) culture; (d) witnessed it; and (e) other. The two most reported categories of the five were “word of mouth” and “first person experience.” The results

Table 1

Categories and Frequencies of “Hooking Up” Definition

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Sexual Encounter (N = 111, 42.9%)	Specifically refers to sexual activity (oral, anal, or vaginal). EX: I believe “hooking up” is oral, or sexual intercourse.
All Encompassing (N = 85, 32.8%)	It is ambiguous in meaning and refers to a broad range of physical or sexual activities. EX: Hooking up in my personal opinion can mean anything from making out to having sex.
One-Night Stand (N = 27, 10.4%)	It only last one-night and no further encounter or commitment. EX: Having sex with someone for a night and never talking to them again.
Fooling Around (N = 16, 6.2%)	Explicitly refers to beyond kissing but not having sex (anal, vaginal, oral). EX: Doing physical activities that goes beyond kissing, but no sexual activities.
Kissing (N = 8, 3.1%)	The activity only includes kissing or making out. EX: I guess to me it means just making out.
Dating (N = 5, 1.9%)	In reference to a dating or exclusive relationship. EX: Hooking up sounds like what dating is called in high school.
Other (N = 7, 2.6%)	Definitions that do not fit into any other category

*Note: fifteen participants did not define “hooking up”*

Table 2

Description of factors in a typical hookup

Categories	Descriptions (quoted verbatim)
<b>Male, age 20</b>	
What is the definition of a hookup?	It means kissing and messing around with someone you are not dating and do not want to date.
How know about hookup?	I participated
Who is involved?	Me and a girl I know from class
Where did it take place?	Her dorm room
What lead to the hookup?	A group of my friends and I went to a party. Then I saw her there. We started talking. We both were drinking and I think that made us more relaxed to hookup. After the party was done we went back to her dorm room and had sex
<b>Female, age 18</b>	
What is the definition of a hookup?	Dating casually with no commitment, sex, making out, etc.
How know about hookup?	My friend told me about it.
Who is involved?	My friend and a boy she met downtown.
Where did it take place?	His house
What lead to the hookup?	They met through mutual friends at a bar and ended up getting drunk and going back to his house together.
<b>Female, age 18</b>	
What is the definition of a hookup?	Hooking up is when two people have casual sexual interaction.
How know about hookup?	My friend went to a party and a guy was there that she potentially wanted to date by the end of the night they ended up “hooking up” or going home together.
Who is involved?	My friend
Where did it take place?	At a party
What lead to the hookup?	At the party they were dancing and drinking together then after about a couple hours went back to his place...the rest is history.



indicated that participants mostly likely knew about the hookup through talking with others or engaging in a hookup themselves. Cohen's Kappa was acceptable between the two coders ( $k = .93$ ) and percent of agreement was 96%. Six categories were used to describe "who was involved in the hookup": (a) friends; (b) self; (c) roommates; (d) coworkers; (e) family; (f) other. Most of the participants indicated that it was either someone from their friend network or themselves who was involved. Cohen's Kappa reliability between the two coders was .95 and percent of agreement was 97%. Nine categories were used to describe "where the hookup took place": (a) other's residences; (b) personal residence; (c) party; (d) bar; (e) vehicle; (f) campus; (g) outside; (h) hotel; (i) other. Most of the participants reported that the hookup took place at a residence (personal or other's), some indicated a party or bar, and a few mentioned other locations, such as, vehicles, campuses, hotel, etc. Cohen's Kappa reliability between the two coders was found to be  $k = .96$  and percent of agreement was 97%. (see Table 3 for the definition, examples, and frequency of each category listed above).

The fourth topic, "what factors lead to the hookup" was analyzed through global thematic analysis and content analysis. To find themes or patterns for what leads to a hookup, the researcher did a global thematic analysis of the participants' narratives. The researcher and one research assistant separately read all the narratives and each composed a list of key themes or patterns. The researcher and research assistant then agreed on ten global themes. The ten global themes included six previously found themes in Paul and Hayes (2002) study, along with three new themes. The six themes found in both Paul and Hayes's (2002) study and this study included drinking alcohol, attending parties, flirting/attraction, hanging out/talking, dancing, and friend arrangement. The four additional themes included friends-with-benefits, spontaneous

Table 3

Factors of Hooking up

Categories	Definitions
How participants knew about hookup:	
Word of mouth (N= 115, 45.5%)	Oral information from person to person. EX: I was told from a friend; Talking with friends.
First person experience (N=111, 43.9%)	The participant personally engaged in the hookup activity. EX: I have done it; I personally engaged in the hookup.
Witnessed it (N= 15, 5.9%)	Hookup was either overheard or seen by participant. EX: I overheard it; saw them.
Culture (N= 8, 3.2%)	It is general knowledge or it is just “known.” EX: Everyone in college does it; culture.
Other (N=4, 1.6%)	Definitions that do not fit into any other category
Who was involved in the hookup:	
Friends (N= 116, 45.8%)	Participant’s friend/s was a member of the hookup. EX: my friend; my best friend and a girl he knows.
Self (N= 110, 43.5%)	Reported personally engaged in the hookup experience. EX: me; myself and a girl.
Roommates (N= 12, 4.7%)	Specifically a roommates of the participant or another person’s roommate. EX: my roommate; a friends roommate.
Coworkers (N= 3, 1.2%)	A person who the participants works with or has worked with. EX: a girl from work; this coworker of mine.

*Table 3 continued*

Family (N=3, 1.2%)	A family member of the participant. EX: my sister; my bother and some random girl.
Other (N= 9, 3.6%)	Individuals that do not fit into any other category
Where hookup took place:	
Others residence (N= 94, 37.2%)	A home or living space that is not the participants. EX: friend's house; her dorm room.
Personal residence (N= 52, 20.6%)	Reference to participant's own home or space. EX: my dorm room; my couch.
Party (N= 47, 18.6%)	A type of group party or celebration. EX: house party; wedding reception.
Bar (N= 19, 7.5%)	A public bar, brewery, or pub. EX: bars; in a bar in Mexico.
Vehicle (N=15, 5.9%)	Any type of motor vehicle. EX: in a car; in my truck
Campus (N= 7, 2.8%)	College or high school property that are not residence. EX: campus study lounge; at the university of Idaho.
Outside (N= 6, 2.4%)	When described as outside/outdoors. EX: outside a house; baseball diamond.
Hotel (N= 6, 2.4%))	Any public hotel or motel. EX: in a hotel room; a hotel in New Zealand.
Other (N=7, 2.8%)	Places that do not fit into any other category.

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*Note: twenty-one participants did not describe factors of a hookup.*

engagement, personal network present and texting/calling. The researcher and one research assistant then read each narrative and coded for the presence or absence of each theme within the narrative (0= absent and 1= present). Cohen's Kappa showed good to excellent reliability between the coders. The lowest reliabilities of the ten themes were flirting/attraction ( $k = .79$ ) with 92% of agreement and hanging out/talking ( $k = .86$ ) with 93% of agreement between coders. The most prevalent themes within the 252 narratives (twenty-two were missing) included spontaneous engagement 96.3% ( $n=232$ ), personal network present 73.4% ( $n=177$ ), drinking alcohol 61.5% ( $n= 155$ ), attending parties 27.8% ( $n=70$ ), hanging out/talking 25.8% ( $n=65$ ), flirting/ attraction 20.6% ( $n=52$ ), and friends-with-benefits 15.5% ( $n=39$ ). The other themes that were present, but not as common, included dancing 9.1% ( $n=23$ ), texting/calling 8.4% ( $n=23$ ), and friend arrangement 7.5% ( $n=19$ ).

In the next phase of the analysis, the researcher used the themes to find patterns or sequences that lead to a hookup. Since the alcohol themes appeared in over 60% of the narratives, the researcher created the two main categories of "alcohol hookup scripts" and "sober hookup scripts." An alcohol hookup script is defined by the participant's description of being under-the-influence of alcohol in his/her decision to hookup. A sober hookup script is defined by no alcohol having been involved in the decision to engage in a hookup. Subscripts under alcohol and sober scripts were organized according to three additional distinctions: (1) whether participants reported the presence or absence of their personal network (i.e., "we were all just having a good time at a friends" or "Just the two of us went out for dinner, then a play, then back to her place where we watched movies"), (2) whether the hookup involved sex (oral, anal, or vaginal) or no sex (any behavior less than sex), and (3) whether the hookup was planned or spontaneous.

Thus, eight “sub-scripts” fell under each of the two main hookup scripts to make up seventeen total “sub-scripts” (17 was “other”). The eight “sub-scripts” under each of the main script included: (a) personal network present and planned sex; (b) personal network present and spontaneous sex; (c) personal network present and planned no sex; (d) personal network present and spontaneous no sex; (e) personal network absent and planned sex; (f) personal network absent and spontaneous sex; (g) personal network absent and planned no sex; (h) personal network absent and spontaneous no sex. Cohen’s Kappa indicated acceptable reliability between the two coders ( $k = .84$ ). The percent of agreement between the two coders was 88%. Prior to further analyses, some scripts were removed due to low frequencies. In addition, planned and spontaneous sex and no sex were collapsed due to very little description of planned hookups. It was evident that spontaneity is common in behavior hookup scripts as only nine out of 252 participants reported a planned hookup.

In the end, eight main “sub-scripts” typologies were included in the final analyses. The three sub-scripts of personal network present and sex, personal network present and no sex, and personal network absent and sex fell under the alcohol scripts. The four sub-scripts that fell under sober scripts included personal network present and sex, personal network present and no sex, personal network absent and sex, and personal network and no sex. The eighth “sub-script” referred to “other”. Table 4 displays definitions and the frequency for each main “sub-script.” The content analysis indicated the most frequent hookup script consisted of drinking alcohol with friends or in groups that leads to engaging in sex (oral, anal, or vaginal sex). Another common script included drinking alcohol with friends/in groups that led to no sex (i.e., kissing, making out). A script that was common under both alcohol and sober hookups was when the person’s personal network was absent, and it led to sex.

Table 4

## Alcohol and Sober Hookup Script Typology

Alcohol Scripts/Sub-scripts	Definitions
1. Personal network present and sex (N=125, 49.6%)	College friend(s)/people are present during decision to engage in sex (oral, anal, or vaginal).
2. Personal network present and no sex (N=35, 13.9%)	College friend(s)/people are present during decision to engage in no sex (any physical interaction other than oral, anal, or vaginal sex).
3. Personal network absent and sex (N=20, 7.9%)	No friend(s) or other people are present during decision to engage in sex (oral, anal, or vaginal).
Sober Scripts/Sub-scripts	Definitions
4. Personal network present and sex (N=10, 4%)	College friend(s)/people are present during decision to engage in sex (oral, anal, or vaginal).
5. Personal network present and no sex (N=10, 4%)	College friend(s)/people are present during decision to engage in no sex (any physical interaction other than oral, anal, or vaginal sex).
6. Personal network absent and sex (N=32, 12.7%)	No friend(s) or other people are present during decision to engage in sex (oral, anal, or vaginal).
7. Personal network absent and no sex (N=12, 4.8%) to engage	No friend(s) or other people around during decision in no sex (any physical interaction other than oral, anal, or vaginal sex).
8. Other (N=8, 3.2%)	Scripts that do not fit into any other category

*Note: twenty-two participants did not describe a narrative that lead to hookup. Due to the low frequencies of “personal network absent and no sex” scripts, the scripts were collapsed into “other”.*

In examining hookup themes it is clear that the most distinguishing attributes that lead to a hookup are alcohol, group settings/parties (social network presence), and spontaneous engagement. Alcohol and network presence were both factors that contributed to an individual's decision to engage in a hookup. Of the 244 participants who described a hookup narrative (either no sex or sex), 187 reported sex and 57 no sex. In addition, 180 described a hookup in which alcohol was present versus 64 describing a hookup without alcohol. The results of a chi-square test indicated that the frequency of sex versus no sex hookups was related to the presence versus absence of alcohol when alcohol was present  $\chi^2 [1, n= 252] = 7.07, p < .05$  than when alcohol was absent. An examination of the cell percentage indicated that of the 180 who described alcohol present in time of hookup, 85% (n=145) reported the hookup led to sex. Of the 64 who described alcohol absent in time of hookup, 66% (n=42) reported the hookup led to sex.

In terms of the connection between network present and engaging in a sex hookup, 180 participants described a network presence and 64 described a network was absent in narratives describing a hookup (either no sex or sex). The results indicated a notably higher number of participants who described a networks presence in describing a sex hookup script. Of the 180 individuals who described a network presence in time of hookup, 75% (n=135) reported the hookup led to sex. Of the 62 who described network absent, 83% (n=52) reported the hookup led to sex.

### *Social Networks Influence in Hooking Up*

Descriptive data for the social network variables of range and frequency are reviewed in Table 5. In regards to range, the participants indicated that they discussed topics related to hookups with all of the three types of links (university friends, non-university friends, and family). Three types of relationships previously mentioned were evaluated. The maximum

Table 5

Summary Statistics of Network Variables (Range, Frequency, Closeness)

Network Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Range	1.77	.744	0.00 – 3.00
Frequency of discussion with			
Friends from university	1.25	.667	0.00 – 2.60
Friends outside university	1.03	.602	0.00 – 2.60
Family	.413	.503	0.00 – 2.20
Closeness	4.05	.57	0.00 – 5.00

*Note: n = 269. For frequency variable 0 = never and 3 = more than 6 times*



range value the participant could report was three. However, participants indicated less discussion with family than with friends (university friends and non-university friends). On topic of hooking up and hookup consequences the frequency of discussion was based on a 4-point scale (0 = never and 3 = more than 6 times). The results indicated that the frequency of discussion with university and non-university friends on topics related to hooking up ranged between one to six times in the past 4 months. Frequency of discussion with family ranged between zero to two times in the past 4 months. Irrespective of the type of relationship frequency was low to moderate in all types of relationships.

It was argued that the more diverse links within a person's social network, the more access there was to a wider range of opinions and knowledge about hooking up behavior (Burt, 1983a). The diversity should play a role in a participant's choice to engage in a risky hookup. This prompted the researcher to hypothesize that network range would be negatively related to network approval of non-relationship sex attitudes and behavior (*H1*). A bivariate correlation was computed to test hypothesis 1. Network range and network approval of non-relationship sex attitude and behavior were significantly related, however, it was in the opposite direction than predicted. The results indicated a positive correlation of range with network approval ( $r = .21, p < .01$ , two-tailed) and behavior ( $r = .24, p < .01$ , two-tailed). This hypothesis was not supported. These results corroborate a previous study in which the authors predicted a negative relationship between social network range and drinking in excess and found the same reverse relationship (Dorsey, et al., 1999).

Given that past research has supported that networks have agreed-upon norms, model appropriate behavior, and have a strong influence on the people within them (Collins, 1988; Stohl, 1995), there was reason to expect that network approval would be positively related to

non-relationship sex attitudes and behaviors (*H2*). The results indicated a significant association between network approval of non-relationship sex and self-approval and participation in non-relationship sex. This hypothesis was supported, network approval was positively related to self-approval about non-relationship sex ( $r = .55, p < .01$ , two-tailed) and self-participation ( $r = .45, p < .01$ , two-tailed). The correlations between network approval and non-relationship sex approval and participation are summarized in Table 6.

Research on closeness in social networks has found that the more closely individuals are tied to their network, the more they model group standards, reward normative behavior, and agree on norms (Collins, 1988; Stohl, 1995). This prompted the researcher to hypothesize that network closeness would moderate the relationship between network approval and non-relationship sex attitudes and behaviors (*H3*). To test this hypothesis, the sample was divided at the median into low closeness and high closeness groups and then the correlations between network approval, personal approval, and hookup behavior were calculated separately for those high in closeness to their network versus low in closeness. The hypothesis was partially supported. Correlations between network approval of non-relationship sex, self-approval, and self-participation in non-relationship sex were statistically significant for both high and low closeness groups. However, the correlation between network approval and self approval was significantly higher in the high closeness group ( $r = .643$ ) versus the low closeness group ( $r = .359$ ) based on Fisher's  $r$  to  $z$  transformation (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). The correlation between network approval and behavior was also somewhat higher in the high closeness group ( $r = .478$ ) than the low closeness group ( $r = .395$ ), however, the difference between these correlations was not statistically significant (see Table 7 for correlations).

One particular finding of past research of a positive relationship between the frequency of conversation about drinking and drinking in excess (Dorsey, et al., 1999) provoked the final hypothesis. This hypothesis predicted that college network frequency in discussion of non-relationship sex would be positively related to non-relationship sex attitudes and behavior (*H4*). This hypothesis was supported. A significant correlation emerged between the overall frequency of discussing non-relationship sex and reports of self-approval and participation in non-relationship sex. Overall frequency of discussion (with all networks) was related to self-approval ( $r = .16, p < .01$ , two-tailed) and behavior ( $r = .241, p < .01$ , two-tailed). Additional results showed relationships between frequency of discussion with each network separately and self-approval and behavior. The strongest correlation was for frequency of discussion with university friends and self attitude ( $r = .28, p < .01$ , two-tailed) and self behavior ( $r = .39, p < .01$ , two-tailed). There was also a significant correlation between frequency of discussion with non-university friends and self-attitude ( $r = .25, p < .01$ , two-tailed) and behavior ( $r = .25, p < .01$ , two-tailed). Results also showed a small significant correlation between frequency of discussion with family and self-behavior ( $r = .23, p < .01$ , two-tailed), but no association between discussion with family and self-approval.

Table 6

Correlations Between the Network Approval and Non-relationship Sex Attitude and Behavior

Measure	Network Approval	Approval	Behavior
Network Approval	—	.549**	.450**
Approval	.549**	—	.525**
Behavior	.450**	.525**	—

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7

High/Low Closeness: Correlations Between Network Approval and Self-Approval and Behavior

	Network Approval	Approval	Behavior
Network Approval	—	.643**	.478**
Approval	.359**	—	.541**
Behavior	.395**	.504**	—

Notes: Correlations in the upper half of the table are for those high in closeness to the social network. Correlations in the lower half are for those low in network closeness.

\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The current research assessed the influence of social networks and the way individuals within networks may legitimize and/or encourage risky social behaviors by the way they talk about hooking up. This study employed a social network approach to understand the influence networks have on individuals' attitudes and behaviors about hooking up. It illustrates how one's social network's approval of non-relationship sex influences their approval and participation in non-relationship sex.

Individuals reported high approval and participation towards non-relationship sex when they perceived their social network as approving. In addition, individuals reported especially high approval of non-relationship sex when they perceived strong closeness or bonds to their network. Network closeness did not strongly moderate the relationship between network approval and behavior towards non-relationship sex. However, there was a somewhat stronger association between network approval and participation in a hookup when individuals felt close to their network. These results confirm that individuals tend to reflect the attitudes and behaviors legitimized by their college network, especially when they feel close to their network. These results are consistent with network research showing that social networks have strong influence on an individual's behaviors, attitudes, and norms (Collins, 1988; Stohl, 1995; Dorsey, et al., 1999). It is evident that an individual's network can create a "culture of encouragement" surrounding risky social behaviors.

It was apparent that the term "hooking up" is a common phrase used in today's college culture in reference to sexual activity. This study illustrates that a high percentage of participants (54.3%) report engaging in a sexual hookup (oral, anal, or vaginal) during the recent school year. This study revealed 63.2% of males and 45.1% of females engaged in a hookup in the current

school year. The results also indicated that males report engaging in more hookups than females. Furthermore, the participants perceive that almost 90% of their college peers engage in a hookup during college. This finding is consistent with past research showing that students generally favor the idea that their peers are hooking up more often and are more comfortable with engaging in a hookup (Lambert et al., 2003; Bogle, 2008)

It is clear from the results that participants knew the general meaning of hooking up and most defined a hookup as a *sexual encounter* (42.9%) which refers to oral, anal, or vaginal sex or *all encompassing* (32.8%) which was a broad range of physical or sexual activity. This is not a surprising finding as many past researcher have defined hookup using similar terms (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; Lambert et al., 2003; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). All these findings demonstrate that hooking up is common on college campuses and give support that the hookup culture does exist among the college population.

#### *Social Network Influence on Hooking up*

In addition to the high percentage of individuals participating in non-relationships sex, one of the most interesting findings in this study is the involvement of the social network within the hooking up culture. The results indicated that the most common hookup scripts are those that are social (network present). A large percentage of the participants reported a script that included network presences and alcohol, which leads to spontaneous sex. These scripts reflect the “party scene” culture, in which, past research views as a large part of the hookup culture (Paul & Hayes, 2002; Bogle, 2008). These results confirm that many individuals see their social network as encouraging participation in hookups. This encouragement is likely to lead to risky sexual behaviors, for example, unplanned or unprotected sex under the influence of alcohol and/or with multiple partners, which increases the risk of contracting an STD.

### *Hooking up and Communication with Social Networks*

The study also found that the more individuals discuss hooking up with their social network, the more they report approving and participating in non-relationship sex. This study expected that the more frequently individuals talk about hooking up with their college network (e.g. friends, classmate, roommates from college), the more likely they are to approve and participate in non-relationship sex. The results did indicate a positive association between frequency of discussion and self-approval and participation. However, one of the surprising findings was there was also a positive association between the other two network links (non-college friends and family members) and participation in non-relationship sex. This finding suggests that talking about hooking up topics with anyone, including college friends, non-college friends and family, demonstrates that hookups are salient to the individual and may have effects in normalizing non-relationship sex. Perhaps talking freely about hookup topics or behaviors reinforces the sense that hookups are typical behavior for college students.

Frequently talking about hooking up as if it is “no big deal” may add a certain element of appeal to a behavior that is inherently risky (STDs, unplanned pregnancy, etc). A high percentage of individuals in this study defined a hookup to mean either sex or all encompassing sexual behavior and very few viewed a hookup to mean kissing or dating. These results suggest that most individuals define a hookup as a brief sexual or physical behavior.

Research has previously stated that communication frequently functions to help people attain personal, social, and relational goals (Berg, 1997; Dillard, 1990). Communicating the phrase “hooking up” in reference to a sexual act may create a charming or attractive perception of what truly is a risky behavior. There is also a health concern as a high percentage of college



students in this study have engaged in non-relationship sex even with the potential threat of STDs, such as, chlamydia and gonorrhea which are on the rise in ages 15-24 (CDC, 2007).

#### *Limitations and Future Considerations*

As with any social science study, there are limitations that should be kept in mind throughout the evaluation of research. First, in term of methodological issues, data was collected using online self-report questionnaires. Even though the questionnaire included both Likert-type scales and open-ended questions eliciting narratives to gather detailed rich results, the data were self-reported. This method could have biases, such as, social desirability and limited human recollection. Social desirability must be considered when using self-report, especially with a topic about non-relationship sex. For example, males may have over reported the number of hookups they engaged in to increase social status, whereas females may have reported fewer to protect what people think about them. In addition, when participants were asked to recall a certain hookup experience, their accounts could be limited in facts and details, especially when they reported a hookup they had not experienced themselves. Although the anonymity of the online questionnaires may have alleviated some social desirability pressures, future research could combine in-depth interviews with questionnaire methods.

A second limitation is the demographics of the sample. Although the focus was on the hooking up culture, which is most common on college campuses, the participants were only recruited from lower-level classes and most were freshman. Hence, it is unclear if the results are generalizable to all ages or education levels of college students. Also, because the study used college students, it does not represent the overall population's beliefs on the hooking up culture. Future research could include more students from upper-class courses and individuals who have graduated or are living outside the college community. Research could also study a younger

population by looking at middle and high school students. This would allow for a further understanding of hooking up and non-relationships sex.

Last, the study could have asked more follow-up questions to the hookup narrative and questions to understand the risky side of hooking up. To better comprehend the risky side of the hooking up culture, more health specific questions could be implemented. Future research could ask more about the amount of alcohol consumed before hookup, if there was protection used, or sexual health history (e.g. if one has or has had an STD).

More research on non-relationship sex is needed by combining an interpersonal and health communication approach to understand how to educate young adults in making sexual and relationship choice within this hookup culture. The way young people intimately interact and create sexual relationship will continue to change as it has in the past. Current studies suggest that we are living in the “hooking up era” (Bogle, 2008) and it important to continue to study this culture from different perspectives.

### *Conclusion*

The current research extends recent efforts of short-term relationship researchers to better understand the hooking up culture from a network perspective. The results of this study revealed that hooking up does occur on college campuses and individuals’ networks do influence their self-approval and participation in non-relationship sex. This study will hopefully lend itself to a better understanding of the hooking up culture that is a large part of the culture on college campuses today. Among parents, teachers, scholars and members of the university communities, there is concern for how young people create, maintain, and view relationships. Continuing the examination of network influence on non-relationship sex and the hooking up culture will help

people better understand students' apparent approval and participation in this risky sexual behavior.

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## **Appendices**

## APPENDIX A: SHORT-TERM RELATIONSHIPS ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

### Online Survey of Short-Term Relationship

#### I. WELCOME – Information and Consent

Hello.

You are being asked to take part in a research study investigating how you and people close to you talk about short-term relationships that can also be called “hooking up.” If you agree to respond to this survey, you will be asked to think about your thoughts and experiences concerning the hooking up phenomenon.

Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study you may withdraw from the study at anytime without any penalty. Responding to some of the items might cause you to think of past relationships that make you uncomfortable. Please do not continue if you feel uncomfortable.

As an incentive to participate, please note that you will receive FIVE points extra credit from your COMM 111 instructor. Upon completing your survey there will be a short paragraph with information about helpful relationship resources if you want them.

Your participation in this study is anonymous. Your name will not be connected with your responses. Only the researcher, research advisor, and other approved research members will have access to the data. The results of this research may be publicly presented and/or submitted for publication, but names will not be connected to the results.

If you have any questions about the research after completing the survey, please contact Amanda Olson at (406) 243-6604 or [Amanda.olson@umontana.edu](mailto:Amanda.olson@umontana.edu). If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the IRB through The University of Montana Research Office at 243-6670.

At the end of the survey you will be asked for your name and COMM 111 section number. Your name is only requested so that extra credit can be assigned. Your name WILL NOT be connected with your survey. You need to be 18 years or older to take this survey.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. By taking this survey online I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Thank you!

*Click NEXT to continue.*

**II. Demographics**

1. Your Age: \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Your Gender (circle one): Male Female

3. Your Ethnicity (circle one):

- Caucasian Native American African American
- Middle Eastern Asian Latino/a
- Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

4. What year are you in college?

Fr. So. Jr. Sr. Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

5. Sexual orientation (circle one): Heterosexual Homosexual Bisexual

6. Relationship status (circle one): Single Dating Seriously Married

**III. The Term “Hooking up”**

*The first set of questions deals with the phrase “hooking up” that you may have heard or said in conversations with others.*

7. Sometimes, people talk about their sexual activities with other people and use the phrase “hooking up” or “hooked up.” Have you heard of the phrase “hooking up” when referring to sexual activities? (circle one):

Yes No (If no skip to question 13)

8. If yes, please write a few sentences in your own words of what the phrase “hooking up” means to you?

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#### IV. “Hookup”

Below, I would like you to **DESCRIBE ONE** particular “hookup” experience that you know about or have heard about. It can be a time you engaged in a “hookup”, a time a person you know engaged in a “hookup,” or “hookup” you heard about. (Remember, your responses are anonymous).

9. How do you know about this hookup?

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10. Who was I involved in this hookup?

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11. Where did this hookup take place?

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## V. "Hooking Up"

*Thank you for your personal definition and account. However, for the purpose of this study the phrase "hooking up" is used to describe a sexual encounter (vaginal, anal, or oral sex) between two people who are not in a dating or serious relationship and do not expect anything further. Please keep this definition in mind throughout the rest of the survey.*

13. Is the phrase "hooking up," the way I just defined above, commonly used at your school? (circle one):

*Yes                  No                  Not Sure*

14. Since you have come to college, have you experienced a "hookup"? (circle one):

*Yes                  No (Skip to question 16)*

15. If yes, how many times have you hooked up during the current school year? (circle one):

*1 time                  2 times                  3 times                  4 times                  5 times or more*

16. Please think of other students at your school. How often do you think a typical student has hooked up in the current school year? (circle one):

*Zero                  1 time                  2 times                  3 times                  4 times                  5 times or more*

## VI. Short-Term Relationships

17. If you just met someone appealing, and he/she wanted to hookup, you would feel comfortable engaging in a hookup. (circle one number):

*Strongly Disagree    1    2    3    4    5    Strongly Agree*

18. You would feel guilty if you hooked up with someone that you were not in a dating or serious relationship with. (circle one number):

*Strongly Disagree    1    2    3    4    5    Strongly Agree*

19. It would be against your personal beliefs or standards to hookup with someone you were not in an established relationship with. (circle one number):

*Strongly Disagree    1    2    3    4    5    Strongly Agree*



## VII. Talking With Others.

Sometimes people discuss “hookup” experiences they know about with those close to them, for example, friends from college, friends from outside of college, and family members. For the remainder of this questionnaire, I would like you to think about how you communicate with people close to you about the “hooking up” phenomenon.

Who do you talk to about “hooking up”? In the past **4 months**, how many times have you spoken with people on **topics** related to “hooking up” experiences?

Circle the number that best represents the number of conversations you have had with individuals:

In the past <b>4 month</b> , how often have you talked about <b>people engaging in casual sex or hookups:</b>	Never	1-2 times	3-6 times	More than 6 times
20. With friends you know from University of Montana?	0	1	2	3
21. With other friends and acquaintances (Not from University of Montana?)	0	1	2	3
22. With family members?	0	1	2	3
In the past <b>4 month</b> , how often have you talked about <b>unwanted sexual advances:</b>	Never	1-2 times	3-6 times	More than 6 times
23. With friends you know from University of Montana?	0	1	2	3
24. With other friends and acquaintances (Not from University of Montana?)	0	1	2	3
25. With family members?	0	1	2	3
In the past <b>4 month</b> , how often have you talked about <b>safe sex practices:</b>	Never	1-2 times	3-6 times	More than 6 times
26. With friends you know from University of Montana?	0	1	2	3
27. With other friends and acquaintances (Not from University of Montana?)	0	1	2	3
28. With family members?	0	1	2	3

In the past <b>4 month</b> , how often have you talked about <b><u>the connection of alcohol and casual sex or hookups:</u></b>	Never	1-2 times	3-6 times	More than 6 times
29. With friends you know from University of Montana?	0	1	2	3
30. With other friends and acquaintances (Not from University of Montana?)	0	1	2	3
31. With family members?	0	1	2	3
In the past <b>4 month</b> , how often have you talked about <b>potential consequences of casual sex or hookups:</b>	Never	1-2 times	3-6 times	More than 6 times
32. With friends you know from University of Montana?	0	1	2	3
33. With other friends and acquaintances (Not from University of Montana?)	0	1	2	3
34. With family members?	0	1	2	3

Continue to next page....

## VII. Talking with Others in College

On this page, please list the first names of **THREE** people who are part of your college group who (a) you talk with most (b) spend most time with. Then, complete the table by providing the relevant information for each person you list.

Please list a total of **THREE** people. If you can think of more than three people, then just list the three people whose opinions matter to you the most. Remember only to list the person's first name.

What is this person's <u>first</u> name?	Gender (circle one)	Have you discussed the "hooking up" phenomenon with this person? <i>(It can be a time you engaged in a "hookup", a time a person you know engaged in a "hookup," or even a story when you heard about a "hookup.")</i>
1.	M      F	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2.	M      F	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3.	M      F	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

The pages that follow ask about the kind of relationship you have with the people you identified in your list. I have included **ONE PAGE** for each person you identified.

**First Name of Person #1 on Your List:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Please CIRCLE the number that best indicates how much you DISAGREE OR AGREE with the following statements as descriptions of your relationship with the first person on your list.*

- 1= STRONGLY DISAGREE
- 2= DISAGREE
- 3= UNDECIDED
- 4= AGREE
- 5= STRONGLY AGREE

	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>			
1. This person is influential in my life .....	1	2	3	4	5
2. This person thinks engaging in a hookup is wrong.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. My relationship with this person is very close .....	1	2	3	4	5
4. This person thinks engaging in a hookup is risky.....	1	2	3	4	5
5. I communicate with this person often .....	1	2	3	4	5
6. This person believes hooking up is a normal part of college social life...1	2	3	4	5	
7. I care about what this person thinks .....	1	2	3	4	5
8. This person discourages me from getting involved in a hookup.....	1	2	3	4	5
9. This person's opinion matters to me .....	1	2	3	4	5
10. This person chooses not to engage in hookups ... ..	1	2	3	4	5
11. This person believes hooking up is safe .....	1	2	3	4	5

**First Name of Person #2 on Your List:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please **CIRCLE** the number that best indicates how much you **DISAGREE OR AGREE** with the following statements as descriptions of your relationship with the second person on your list.

- 1= STRONGLY DISAGREE
- 2= DISAGREE
- 3= UNDECIDED
- 4= AGREE
- 5= STRONGLY AGREE

	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>			
1. This person is influential in my life .....	1	2	3	4	5
2. This person thinks engaging in a hookup is wrong.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. My relationship with this person is very close .....	1	2	3	4	5
4. This person thinks engaging in a hookup is risky.....	1	2	3	4	5
5. I communicate with this person often .....	1	2	3	4	5
6. This person believes hooking up is a normal part of college social life...1	2	3	4	5	
7. I care about what this person thinks .....	1	2	3	4	5
8. This person discourages me from getting involved in a hookup.....	1	2	3	4	5
9. This person's opinion matters to me .....	1	2	3	4	5
10. This person chooses not to engage in hookups ... ..	1	2	3	4	5
11. This person believes hooking up is safe .....	1	2	3	4	5

**First Name of Person #3 on Your List:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Please CIRCLE the number that best indicates how much you DISAGREE OR AGREE with the following statements as descriptions of your relationship with the third person on your list.*

- 1= STRONGLY DISAGREE
- 2= DISAGREE
- 3= UNDECIDED
- 4= AGREE
- 5= STRONGLY AGREE

	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>			
1. This person is influential in my life .....	1	2	3	4	5
2. This person thinks engaging in a hookup is wrong.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. My relationship with this person is very close .....	1	2	3	4	5
4. This person thinks engaging in a hookup is risky.....	1	2	3	4	5
5. I communicate with this person often .....	1	2	3	4	5
6. This person believes hooking up is a normal part of college social life...1	2	3	4	5	
7. I care about what this person thinks .....	1	2	3	4	5
8. This person discourages me from getting involved in a hookup.....	1	2	3	4	5
9. This person's opinion matters to me .....	1	2	3	4	5
10. This person chooses not to engage in hookups ... ..	1	2	3	4	5
11. This person believes hooking up is safe .....	1	2	3	4	5

**Continue to Next Page....**

### **IX. To Receive Extra Credit**

If you would like to receive extra credit for your COMM 111 class please provide your full name and COMM 111 section number. You are only being asked for your name and section # to receive extra credit, this information WILL NOT be connected to the survey you just completed. The survey and extra credit information is automatically separated to protect you anonymity.

Your name is: \_\_\_\_\_

Your COMM 111 Section number # \_\_\_\_\_

### **X. Thank You for Your Participation!**

Thank you for completing the survey!

If you should want any information on counseling or health services on campus this information is below:

Counseling and Health Services Information  
Curry Health Center  
Student Affairs Division  
The University of Montana  
634 Eddy Ave.  
Missoula, MT 59801  
[contactcurry@mso.umt.edu](mailto:contactcurry@mso.umt.edu)

Curry Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Phone: (406)243-4711

Curry Student Assault Resource Center (SARC) Phone: (406) 243-5244  
(406) 243-6559 - 24 hour Help Line

Curry Medical Services Phone: (406) 243-4330

## APPENDIX B: SHORT-TERM RELATIONSHIP RECRUITMENT HANDOUT

### Short-Term Relationship Online Survey Information

Hello,

I am Amanda Olson, a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Montana. I am recruiting students to answer Short-Term Relationship online survey.

My Masters thesis is investigating how you and people close to you talk about short-term relationships that can also be called “hooking up.” If you agree to respond to this survey, you will be asked to think about your thoughts and experiences concerning the hooking up phenomenon.

To access the Short-Term online survey carefully type in the URL: address, which is:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=6p98p9GhSr6KmpXcpuLQ2w\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=6p98p9GhSr6KmpXcpuLQ2w_3d_3d)

The survey will take approximately 20-25 minutes. Once you have completed the survey, it will ask you for your name and COMM 111 section number to receive extra credit points. Your name is only requested so that extra credit can be assigned. Your name WILL NOT be connected with the survey you completed. Remember your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

Thank you and if you have any questions about the study, please contact Amanda Olson at (406) 243-6604 or [Amanda.olson@umontana.edu](mailto:Amanda.olson@umontana.edu).

Thank You!